

# Career Tips for Young Geologists

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It is a good thing to learn from the advice of the peers in your field. Recently I came across an AAPG publication entitled *Heritage of the Petroleum Geologist* (Sternbach et al., 2017) which included profiles and life lessons of some of the leading and prominent petroleum geologists of our time. The publication is actually a combined two-volume; the first volume was published in 2003. Overall, 109 geologists were featured in the publication, and what especially drew my attention was the item “My advice to you” at the end of each profile. I read, listed and categorized these suggestions; they amounted to 235 career tips, many of which were given by more than one person. It seemed to me the advice given by these living geologists and peers would be most useful if it is summarized in a statistical manner for the benefit of young geologists – hence this article. Below I have organized and annotated the recommendations and career tips made by the peers in the AAPG publication (Sternbach et al., 2017). I have chosen those tips made by at least three persons. Even though these tips come from petroleum geologists, they are equally applicable to all young geologists.

## 1. Enjoy Your Profession. Be Passionate (25 persons)

First and foremost, become a geologist if you really love it because your inner passion is the strongest force that will lead you through the ups and downs of the career path. It is equally important to show your passion for your ideas and projects in the workplace; if you are not passionate about your own work, do not expect others to appreciate it either.

## 2. Persistence and Patience (19)

Persistence and patience pay off. Don't give up easily. Take an optimistic attitude toward your work – whether learning a new skill, conducting a project or looking for a job. Instead of having a fear of failure, ask yourself “What will it take to make this work?”

## 3. Technical Competency and Flexibility (17)

Get a strong technical knowledge and excellence in your field. Evaluate your knowledge and identify the gaps. Learn new skills as necessary. Be versatile and flexible.

## 4. Think outside of the Box. Welcome Challenges (17)

Do not merely follow the crowd. Prepare for new opportunities and changes. Welcome unusual challenges. Find links and patterns between seemingly different data and disciplines. One way to get out of the box and challenge the conventional wisdom is to ask “What if?”

## 5. Networking (14)

Do not isolate yourself; do not try to be a lone wolf. Friendship is richness. Associate, correspond, and collaborate with peers, colleagues, and classmates.

## 6. Membership in Professional Societies (14)

One important way of networking is to join professional societies like the AAPG, AGU, AIPG, GSA, and SEG. Read their publications and be involved in their activities.

## 7. Lifelong Learning (12)

Graduation from a university is not the end of schooling. We actually learn more after we graduate and while we work. Attending workshops and taking training courses are parts of continuing education.

## 8. Integrity and Ethics (11)

Maintain your ethical standards and integrity throughout your career. As the saying goes, “Rome was not built in a day but it can be ruined in a single day.” Do not ruin your credibility for a short-term interest. Be trustworthy: deliver what you promise to do, and do it rightly.

## 9. Be a Mentor and Educator (11)

We learn most when we teach because it is then that we learn to articulate what we know and also notice the gaps in our knowledge. Teach courses whenever you can and mentor junior students and colleagues.

## 10. Good Mentors and Supervisors (10)

Tip #3 is also related to schooling. What is emphasized here is to have good mentors and supervisors – those who are not only top experts but also care to train and help you. Indeed, graduate students often carry the imprints of their supervisors for the rest of their lives.

## 11. Hard work (10)

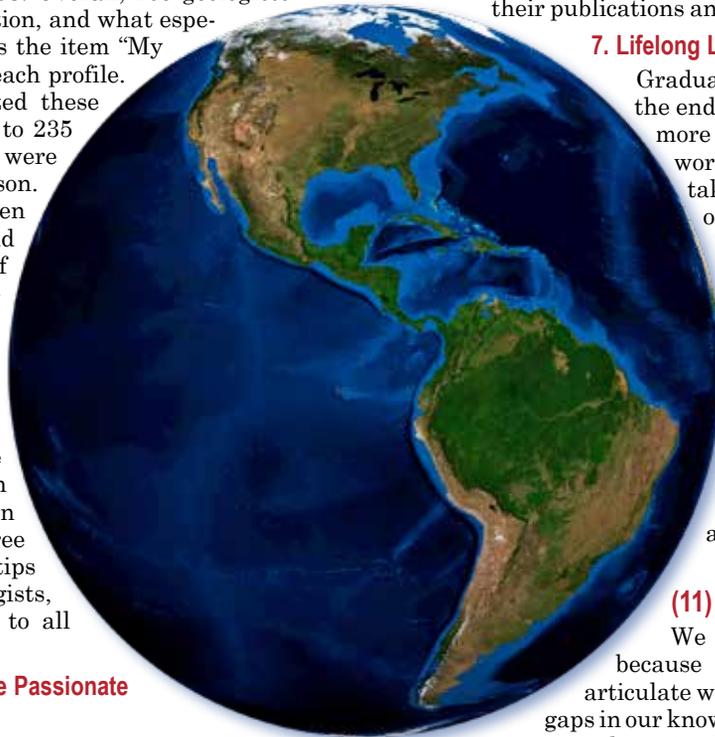
There is no free lunch; nothing is achieved easily, especially in our age of competition. Remember Edison's famous maxim: “Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration.”

## 12. Volunteer (9)

We owe all of our successes and achievements to the help, care and generosity of many others. Give back to your community. Serve in professional committees and projects. Volunteer to convene conference sessions or lead field trips. Review papers for professional journals. All these help your own professional growth as well.

## 13. Read Well and Widely (8)

This is actually part of tip Number 7: lifelong education. But several peers singled out reading as a very important method of learning, possibly because we can manage it in our own



time; moreover, reading is an engaging and reflective process of learning. Be curious and read not only the recent books in your own field but also books on the history and legacy of your field. Deepen your knowledge and broaden your perspective by reading good books and articles.

#### 14. Beware of Booms and Busts (7)

Professional geology, like any other business, goes through the cycle of booms and busts. Try to save money or pay off your debts in good times, and try to learn new skills in low times as a way to prepare for the new challenges and changes in the profession.

#### 15. Strong Knowledge of Geology and Industry (6)

As a geologist you must have a deep knowledge of your particular field. For example, if you are a petroleum geologist you must master the petroleum system – the source rock, generation, migration, reservoir rocks, traps, sealing, accumulation, preservation and so forth. Understanding the petroleum system should be founded on a solid knowledge of sedimentology, stratigraphy, structural geology, field geology, mapping, geochemistry, well logging, and seismic interpretation. Moreover, geology is only one part of the business and industry in which we are; it is essential to understand how your business and industry works and how your particular work fits in the overall operation of the company. In other word, get the “Big Picture.”

#### 16. Attend Professional Conferences (6)

This tip goes well with tip #6 (joining professional societies) but several peers specifically mention that it is crucial to participate in meetings and conferences hosted by those societies and associations. Simply being a member does little good. By attending the conferences we update our knowledge and also identify new trends and problems. It is equally important to present papers in conferences as it bestows on you authority and publicity in your field of expertise.

#### 17. Balance Work with Life (5)

Your career is important but it is only one aspect of your life. Balance your job with your family life, personal hobby, rest, joy and entertainment. Take vacations. A stressed and overworked body and mind actually hurts your job and performance.

#### 18. Be a team player (3)

Consider these facts of life: Humans are social animals. Your job is always transactional. Projects and workplaces involve more than you. Therefore, even for your own interest, be a helpful and pleasant team player.

#### 19. Become interdisciplinary (3)

Earth is not divided into disciplines and departments; it is a set of whole, interconnected, organic systems. It is always good to learn about other disciplines and be able to communicate with other experts. Moreover, projects often involve more than one particular discipline, and we sometimes have to multitask. In fact, at some point in our career it is highly desirable to work in a multidisciplinary team and environment; we learn a lot more this way than we did at school.

#### 20. Learn from your mistakes (3)

Humans are fallible. There are times we make honest mistakes. The more important point is not to make the same mistake twice.

#### 21. Know that you do not know it all (3)

Our knowledge is incomplete and our data are always limited. There are many things that we do not know but need to seek out; there are also still many things that science does

“**The best geologist is he [she] who has seen the most rocks.**”

not know. Science is an evolving and never-ending process of inquiry and discovery. No matter how great a geologist you are, at times the rocks will humiliate you. Do not be upset. Actually, the more we know the more humble we should be.

#### 22. Listen objectively to other opinions (3)

Arrogance, narcissism and know-it-all attitude are not very admirable qualities even if people may not directly criticize us for any of these traits present in us. All perspectives have blind spots and all thought systems have holes. Listen objectively to the opinions, ideas and experiences of others. Listening is an essential art of learning; learn it well even if only to your own advantage.

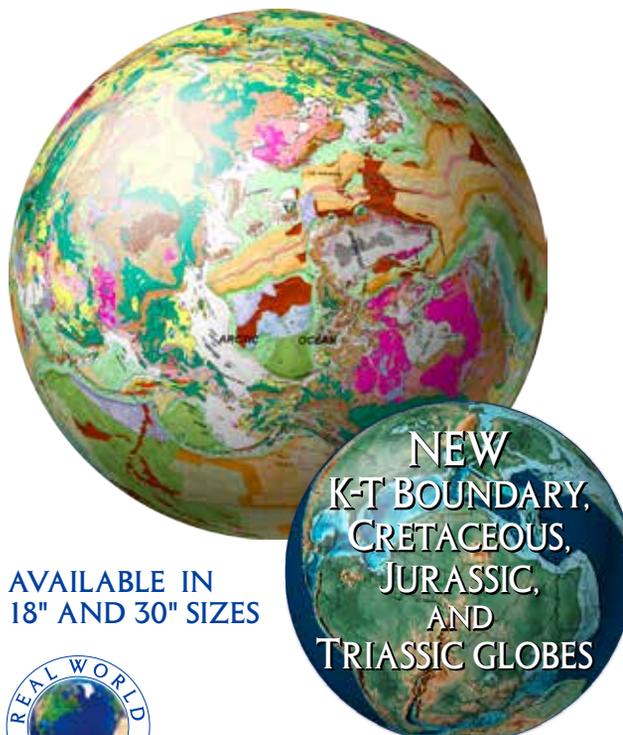
#### 23. Be Yourself (3)

It is a good thing to listen to and learn from the advice of others. But do not try to imitate or compare yourself with others. We come from various walks of life. Each person works and lives in a different situation. Be genuine, honest, a good learner and open to life. Be yourself. Examine things and see if they work for you. Learn from your own life as well.

#### *This Requires Your Special Attention!*

I would like to end this article with a tip that was suggested by only two persons in the AAPG publication but it is my most favored one: Visit Outcrops. Go on field trips; do field work. Listen to rocks. Remember the British geologist H. H. Read’s saying, “The best geologist is he [she] who has seen the most rocks.”

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